

Remarks for
Secy. LaHood
Distracted Driving Press Event
Jan. 12, 2009

- Last fall, the U.S. Department of Transportation sent a wake-up call to American drivers, passengers, and pedestrians everywhere:
 - Distracted driving is a serious, life-threatening epidemic that steals loved ones from us and puts responsible drivers in danger every time they hit the road.
- Our summit on distracted driving was the first in the nation to call federal attention to this dangerous problem, and propose a range of realistic solutions.
- At the summit, we learned that nearly 6,000 people died in 2008 in crashes involving a distracted or inattentive driver, and more than half a million were injured.
- That's a horrifying statistic when you consider that accidents caused by drivers using cell phones, texting, or taking their eyes off the road are entirely preventable.
- And those numbers are probably just the tip of the iceberg!
- We know it will take all of us – federal officials, law enforcement, researchers, policy makers, private industry, and advocates – to tackle this problem effectively.
- In fact, if we're really going to make a difference, we need to hear from the people who matter most.

- We need to hear from the mothers and fathers, the husbands and wives who have suffered the terrible consequences of distracted driving – people who truly understand the toll this takes.
- At our summit, and in the weeks afterward, I met and heard from dozens of people who lost children, spouses, and parents in tragic accidents caused by distracted drivers.
- Some of them are here with us today.
- Their stories are not only heartbreaking. They're also a clear and compelling call to action.
- I'm glad that our summit helped to bring some of these folks together to share their stories with the rest of the country.
- Three individuals, in particular, who attended our summit provided critical perspective -- Dave and Judy Teater and Jennifer Smith.
- They've all suffered terrible losses: Dave and Judy's son, and Jennifer's mother, were killed by drivers talking on cell phones.
- I'm deeply impressed by their commitment to transform personal tragedy into positive actions that will help others.
- Today I'm proud to announce that these individuals have joined forces with other victims to launch the first national nonprofit organization dedicated to ending distracted driving in the U.S.
- The organization is called FocusDriven.

- It's a national network of advocates who will work hard to change America's perception about how to behave when you're behind the wheel.
- I believe this is an important and necessary step to take, to help put this issue on everybody's radar screen – and keep it there.
- I'm hoping that FocusDriven can do for distracted driving what groups like Mothers Against Drunk Driving have done. Like MADD, they can create a real sense of urgency about dangerous and irresponsible driving habits.
- I'm truly grateful that our summit was a catalyst for this group – and for many other efforts to combat distracted driving.
- Over the last several weeks, newspaper editorials around the country have called for new measures to prevent distracted driving – and punish offenders who are caught.
- Students are reaching out to their peers across the country to raise awareness about the dangers of texting and chatting while driving.
- Cell phone makers, insurance companies like Allstate, and others in private industry are coming together to support the responsible use of cell phones and other electronic devices.
- New websites have popped up, including one that encourages drivers to sign a written pledge not to drive while distracted.
- Last month, I attended a distracted driving summit sponsored by the University of Alabama, where transportation researchers were clearly fired up about finding new ways to combat distracted driving.
- We've come a long way on this issue in a very short time.

- The American public clearly wants to see some action on this – and lawmakers are getting the message.
- On January first, my home state of Illinois, plus New Hampshire, joined 18 other states and the District of Columbia by formally banning texting while driving.
- This is now a hot-button issue for state legislatures.
- Lawmakers around the country have proposed roughly 200 bills to ban texting or using hand-held cell phones while driving.
- Boston, Kansas, Kentucky, Missouri, New Mexico, and South Carolina will all see bills introduced this year to combat distracted driving.
- We know Congress has taken a serious interest in this as well.
- At DOT, we believe it's important to practice what we preach – and lead by example.
- On December 30th, my office carried out an Executive Order banning any and all text messaging by all 58,000 DOT employees while they're driving government-owned vehicles or on official government business.
- As part of this order, DOT employees may not use government-issued Blackberrys and other devices while driving – even during off-duty hours.
- We've also launched a new website – “distraction.gov” – that provides current news, information, and statistics.

- This is an excellent clearinghouse and I encourage you to visit the site, watch our national public service video, to learn more about the scope of this problem and what's being done to solve it.
- We're going to continue hammering away at this through a variety of federal actions.
- We've awarded demonstration grants in two states with handheld cell phone laws – New York and Connecticut – to test the extent to which communities respond to highly visible law enforcement activities.
- We're working on new rules to strengthen restrictions on the use of electronic devices by rail, truck, and bus operators.
- And we're seeking to disqualify school bus drivers convicted of texting while driving from maintaining their commercial drivers' licenses.
- I'm personally committed to making sure that we do everything in our power to make every form of transportation in this country as safe as possible.
- We'll keep working with all our stakeholders – public and private, local and national – to find the right mix of regulation, law enforcement, and technology.
- And we'll continue to remind everyone that common sense and personal responsibility play a big role here.
- In the final analysis, we simply cannot legislate behavior.
- It's up to all of us to keep our eyes on the road, every single time we're behind the wheel.

- I don't want your children – or my grandchildren – to suffer at the hands of a driver who's too busy to pay attention to the rules of the road.
- This is a serious issue that deserves our full attention.
- Thank you.